

Chef's Corner: Thai Stingray Fish Cakes with Sweet Chili and Oyster Sauce

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This paradigm shift enters stingray into the upper echelons of gourmet cooking and infuses complex Thai ingredients into a dish that will knock your socks off!

In the angling community, I am known for my ability to change perceptions and break down paradigms when it comes to many oft misunderstood fish and their place on the scale of palatable table fare.

Next to the spiny dogfish, stingray is without a doubt **THE** most underrated and overlooked meat fish across our coastal bays and beaches. I honestly believe this is due to a general fear of the buggy-whip tail & stinger; the unusual physical anatomy of the fish; and limited information on how to properly transform this protein treasure trove into some of the most versatile fillets available – bar none!



Pan-fried Thai Fishcake Entrée & Sweet Chili Sauce.



Thai Stingray Slider – Great Appetizer or Lunch!

When my family was in the restaurant business, we were one of the first to recognize and popularize several local dishes, most notably – Monkfish. The parallels here are amazing. Once we got past all that slime, the ginormous head, and the anxiety of how to prepare the meat for the table, Monkfish fillets became one of our best sellers, and we made good margin since most fishermen considered them to be trash fish and either discarded them or were more than happy to unload them (sound familiar?). I feel that is where we are with stingray, and the amount of pure edible fillets that come from the two wings of even an average 20-pounder is well worth the processing effort.

Trash fish or game fish? Until now, stingrays have been considered trash fish. Noted for great runs and occasional aerial displays, these powerful fighters are excellent table fare, moving them onto and up my personal game fish list!

Just look at the diversity of these dishes which I have recently created using Stingray as the main ingredient:

- NC-style Stingray BBQ with Cole Slaw and Creamy Potato Salad – most folks can't believe it's not pork!
- Manhattan-style Stingray Fish Chowder with minced Clams and Grilled Garlic Toast
- Stingray Fingers with Honey Mustard, Buffalo Wing, and Barbecue Dipping Sauces, with Celery and Carrot Sticks and my homemade Chunky Bleu Cheese Dressing
- English Pub Stingray Fish-n-Chips with Malt Vinegar and hand-cut homemade fries

- Fran’s Stingray & Shrimp Pasta Salad – this is such an amazing beach and general snack food to have in the fridge and eat cold!
- Creamy Stingray and Potato Soup with Oyster Crackers and a dab of Dry Sherry
- Curried Stingray and Vegetables with Turmeric-infused Basmati Rice and Hot Mango Chutney
- Blackened Stingray Bites – these puppies are spicy, Juicy, have great texture, & plain blow away Tuna bites!
- Stingray and Cheddar Sandwich with my homemade Tarter Sauce and hand-cut fries
- Louisiana-style Stingray Gumbo – you’ll be amazed by the flavors and texture

And that’s just the tip of the iceberg! As I continue to experiment and publish Stingray recipes, and as folks begin to try this overlooked delicacy, I am convinced Stingray will start showing up in local restaurants that are “in the know” and to prominently feature this local fare in the proper light!

Okay, off the Stingray soapbox, and on with the this wildly delicious recipe!

Ingredients:

As with all of my instinctive creations, the ingredients used in this recipe reflect what I had on hand and may certainly be adjusted up or down to suit available portions and/or personal taste, but I must say – this was spot-on for my taste buds at a time when I was looking for something new that delivered some “POP!”

1-½ pounds of stingray meat, finely minced or chopped (I actually used the 1 pound, 9 ounces I had on hand)

5 green onions (scallions) finely minced or chopped (I used both the white and green ends)

½ small white onion, finely minced or chopped (had a small piece in the fridge, so what the heck?)

4-5 cloves fresh garlic, crushed and finely minced or chopped (use less if you are not a garlic fan!)

¼ cup finely chopped cilantro or flat-leaf parsley (wash thoroughly – my batch had sand and needed several rinses!)

½ seeded Ghost Pepper – finely minced (this is *optional* as it adds heat, so leave this out or use a Thai chili if you want to go on the milder side of the Scoville scale, but this was judged to be just fine by my wife and youngest daughter, Mia!)

1 teaspoon of finely grated fresh ginger root (*approximately* one small root bulb) – I used a zester, and it worked great



Slice and Dice Stingray Fillet.



Chop & mince to fine texture.



Add fresh ginger zest & Thai pepper.

NOTE: For folks that are not as patient or handy with a knife, a food processor may be used – just don’t overdo it or you will lose the mouth-feel and texture...which is why I used the knife for all of these “minced” ingredients. In the case of the fish, I recommend hand mincing ½-pound and processing 1 pound to maintain some good texture in the cakes.

2 tablespoons oyster sauce

2 tablespoons sweet Thai chili sauce

2 tablespoons fish sauce

1 tablespoon brown sugar

1 teaspoon sea salt – recommend sprinkling on the cutting board to absorb the garlic oil – something I always do when crushing and chopping fresh garlic!

2 large brown eggs (I used 2 because I like fluffy cakes – 1 egg is fine if you like them with more density)

¾ cup all-purpose flour to bind the fish cake mixture (I started with ½ cup and added ¼ cup to thicken a bit more)

Oil for frying (bacon grease, canola, corn oil, or my favorite – peanut oil)

One of the following to dust the cake before frying: Panko, bread crumbs, or all-purpose flour – I like Panko!



Chop and mince green onion.



Chop and mince cilantro.



Combine in large bowl & mix well.



Directions:

***Fast and Easy Mixing Method:** Combine fish, flour, and all other ingredients in food processor, and process until well-combined. Stingray meat is firm, so be sure to coarsely chop before processing – likewise with the veggies!

Traditional Preparation:

Using a sharp knife, chop and mince stingray meat until close to minced-meat consistency – some slightly larger bits are okay to add texture, but it should be pretty well chopped to make sure it mixes well.

Finely chop and mince onion, garlic, cilantro, and ghost pepper.

In a large mixing bowl, combine minced fish, minced vegetables, and zested ginger root with flour, eggs, Thai sweet chili sauce, oyster sauce, fish sauce, salt, and brown sugar.

Thoroughly combine and stir all ingredients into a smooth, homogeneous mixture consistency.

Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to chill and set the mixture or it will be very messy to work with. I let mine “set” for 2 hours to allow all the flavors to meld and distribute. It will firm-up nicely in the fridge.

When you’re ready to cook-up a batch, choose one of the following techniques – I tried them all, and each worked great!

Basic Fishcake Patties:

Heat about ½-inch of oil in a skillet to medium-high heat. I chose bacon grease for my first run. Peanut oil is best.

TIP: when forming patties, I get a little grease on my hands to prevent mixture from sticking as much.

Form stingray cakes into flat patties of desired diameter, lightly dust with flour (or Panko), and fry about 4 minutes on each side or until golden brown and cooked through. For crispier texture, roll cakes into Panko or bread crumbs and pat crumbs into cake to adhere for frying. Start with medium heat to cook through. Increase heat a tad to brown if desired.



Panko-coated Stingray Cakes and a little bacon grease



Pan-fry over Medium Heat to Brown & Cook Through.

Thai Stingray Burgers and Sliders:

Form mixture into ¼-pound patties and fry in skillet or griddle on medium heat until brown and cooked through.

Serve on lightly-toasted sesame seed bun with sliced tomato, onion, lettuce, and pickle wedge.

Recommended Condiment: Zesty Lime-Garlic Aioli.

Dine on the deck of your favorite cottage in NC's Outer Banks, and add a slice of melted Swiss, Cheddar, or Provolone cheese to create the perfect Stingray Cheeseburger in Paradise!

Thai Stingray Mini-Cake Appetizers:

Heat a deep fat fryer to 375 degrees Fahrenheit, or in a skillet, raise about ½-inch of oil to just above medium heat.

Form mixture into 2-inch cigar-shaped cakes or 2-inch diameter rounded flat cakes, roll in panko or bread crumbs, and fry until golden brown and cooked through.

TIP: Cook 1 or 2 “samples” to make sure you have a feel for your set-up before dropping a large batch in the basket or skillet! This is important to make sure the size of the mini-cake is matched with the right oil temperature to cook through.



Melting cheese over Stingray mini-cake sliders.



Stingray cake slider with BBQ tater chips for lunch!!

Serve with any of the following condiments and garnish with cilantro and dressed scallions:

Sweet Thai Chili Sauce; Hot Chinese Mustard; and/or Zesty Lime-Garlic Aioli

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